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A monstrous appendage: British Library MS Harley 2799, f. 243 and the illustrated De portentis

Abstract: This paper seeks to explore and contextualise the gallery of monstrous peoples occurring in f. 243 of London, British Library MS Harley 2799 (the second volume of the so-called *Arnstein Bible*, produced in the Rhineland around 1170 and comprising several addenda of geographical, cosmological and computistical interest). A comparison between these drawings and the pictorial programmes accompanying section VII.7 of Hrabanus Maurus' *De universo* (the tract independently known as *De portentis*) reveals that the material isolated in the Harley manuscript is not an *ad hoc* creation, but part of a far-reaching and deeply-rooted genealogy of texts and images. Careful analysis of this material in light of the pictorial evidence afforded by the two extant examples of Hrabanus' *De universo* –Montecassino Abbey Library Cod. Casiniensis 132 and Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana Cod. Pal. lat. 291– can thus shed new light on both the Harley composition and the illustration of the corresponding Isidorian-Hrabanian tract. Concomitantly, it will be argued, its re-contextualisation on the 'outer edges' of a Bible manuscript is in itself a significant testimony to the versatility of this legendary, and to its enduring grasp on the medieval imagination.

Keywords: monstrous races; *De portentis*; Hrabanus Maurus; Isidore of Seville.

Resumo: O presente artigo pretende analisar e contextualizar a galeria de espécimes monstruosos que preenche o fólio 243 do segundo volume do códice vulgarmente denominado *Bíblia de Arnstein*. Este manuscrito (Londres, Biblioteca Britânica, MS Harley 2799) foi produzido na Renânia durante a década de 1170 e enquadra o material que nos concerne no âmbito de uma série de apêndices 'marginais' de temática geográfica, cosmológica e computística congregados no início e no fim do volume. Através de uma comparação entre este reportório e os programas iconográficos que acompanham o tratado *De portentis* na tradição Isidoro-Rabaniana –nomeadamente nos códices Casiniensis 132 da Biblioteca Abacial de Montecassino e Pal. lat. 291 da Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana– procurar-se-á demonstrar que o material isolado no último fólio da Bíblia de Arnstein não configura uma criação *ad hoc*, e muito menos uma curiosidade ociosa, mas enquadra-se numa velha e venerável genealogia textual e pictórica com firmes raízes no imaginário medieval. Concomitantemente, procurar-se-á explorar as condições e motivações que explicam o reenquadramento deste *corpus* na periferia de um texto alógeno, e esboçar algumas das razões que podem ter atendido à sua 'reinvenção' neste contexto específico.

Palavras-chave: monstros; *De portentis*; Rábano Mauro; Isidoro de Sevilha.

Introduction

The Arnstein Bible fills two large volumes (545 x 375 mm) corresponding to British Library MSS Harley 2798 and 2799. Produced during the 1170s at the Premonstratensian Abbey of SS. Mary and Nicholas in Arnstein, Rhineland,¹ it contains a gallery of large historiated and foliated initials in a rich late-Romanesque style, on account of which it has been included in several surveys of Romanesque illumination. Its significance within the history of German art in the twelfth century has often been highlighted, as have its stylistic affinities with a small number of well-known Rhenish Bible manuscripts of the period, such as the famed Worms and Floreffe Bibles.²

A no less remarkable –but less frequently discussed– feature of this manuscript is the presence of a number of ‘extraneous’ contents of cosmological, computistic and geographic interest at the beginning and end of its second volume (which runs from the Book of Job to Revelation). Thus, on f. 1 we find a mnemonic calendar; f. 241v contains a tree of philosophy, displaying its subsidiary disciplines according to the plan by Martianus Capella, and a schematic but heavily captioned T-O world map; f. 242rv displays a large model of the planetary orbits (also centred on a small world-map), an *Annus Mundus Homo* diagram, and several smaller schemata representing the mechanics of lunar and solar eclipses; to this is added a zonal map in the tradition of Macrobius. More visually striking, and perhaps more unexpected, is the textual and pictorial composition taking up the whole of f. 243, dealing with the monstrous races of far-away lands (fig. 1). All addenda have captions in an informal protogothic script that could conceivably correspond to the less solemn hand of Lunandus, the scribe known to have copied the main text³ or alternatively to some close contemporary from the same community.



Fig 1. Monstrous races. London, British Library MS Harley 2799, f. 243
(© The British Library).

1 KÖLLNER 1972, 34.

2 DODWELL 1993, 283.

3 KÖLLNER 1972, 35-36.

That the unusual composition on f. 243 (henceforth abbreviated HAR. for convenience) has received such little sustained attention is striking, considering the frequency with which it is reproduced and the major academic interest currently elicited by the themes of monstrousness and alterity in medieval culture. The main purpose of the pages ahead is to sketch out a context for its contents, showing that –far from a spurious or *ad hoc* creation– they are best understood as part of a well-established, and fairly widespread, tradition.

Context of the Harley monsters

HAR. depicts seventeen creatures, each captioned with a quotation or close paraphrase from Isidore's survey of monstrous peoples in Book XI of his *Etymologiae*, where the topic is treated under the rubric *De portentis*. While this repertoire does not seem to have been illustrated within this tradition (judging from the vast number of extant specimens of the *Etymologiae*, none of which carry more than simple diagrams), a pictorial cycle was developed for it in the course of the transmission of Hrabanus Maurus' *De universo* –essentially a Carolingian appropriation of Isidore's encyclopædia, rearranged and glossed. G. C. Druce, in his brief but insightful discussion of this leaf, was able to identify the descriptions in its legends as obtained specifically from Hrabanus' variant of the Isidorian text, on account of a minor scribal corruption belonging to this tradition –namely the height attributed to the *Macrobiani*.⁴ But because Druce limited his manuscript *comparanda* to English libraries, and particularly to a small number of bestiaries of insular production, the illustrations developed for Hrabanus' encyclopaedia on the continent were not contemplated by his analysis.

Such illustrations survive in two manuscripts, where they are assembled onto large 'frontispieces' heading the *De portentis* tract –in a layout that is similar to the arrangement in Harley. The extraordinary *De universo* in Montecassino Abbey Library Cod. Casiniensis 132 (henceforth CAS.) contains a wealth of pictorial material –a total of 360 coloured pen-and-ink drawings illustrating chapter openings and paragraph entries throughout the work's 22 books– among which the representation of monstrous races is found on f. 84v / p. 168 (fig. 2). It was produced in the house where it still resides c. 1020, by commission of its then-abbot



Fig 2. Monstrous races. Montecassino Abbey Library Cod. Casiniensis 132, f. 84v / p. 168 (detail)
(© Montecassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia).

⁴ DRUCE 1915, 139.

Theobald.⁵ A much later version is Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana Cod. Pal. lat. 291 (henceforth PAL.), created in Southern Germany c. 1425 for Ludwig III, Elector Palatine. Also preserving the full 22 books, it displays what appears to be a stylistic reinterpretation of a closely-related pictorial tradition, including a broadly similar layout and iconography at the head of *De portentis* (f. 75v) (fig. 3). The Cassinese illustrator uses a thick framework to stress the material structure of the display, which is like a bookcase or cabinet, while the Vatican manuscript prefers to align its monsters against a plain dark-blue backdrop. In both cases, the sequence shown is reflective of their order of appearance in the text of the following chapter, although the sample is highly select.

The Isidore-Hrabanus tradition is idiosyncratic among other early sources dealing with ‘monstrous’ material in the arrangement to which it subjects its repertoire, following a lengthier *expositio* on “man and his parts” (*De homine et partibus eius*). Overarchingly, it observes the distinction between spurious, ethnic and fictive monsters, while the second of these categories is internally structured by formal taxonomy –progressing from creatures described as great predators to creatures characterised by facial deformities, those with monstrous feet or unusual means of locomotion and those differentiated by their unusual size. Clearly, HAR. preserves an echo of this latter system, owing to its general observance of the Isidorian sequence. However, without the textual framework afforded by the preceding sections of Book XI (VII in Hrabanus’ version), stress is perceptibly removed from monsters’ potential as taxonomical *comparanda* –iconising the various deviations from the divinely-imparted image of God in man– which appears to have been one of the purposes of their appearance in the *Etymologiae*.

The *monstruosas gentes* of f. 243

The HAR. composition is divided into three horizontal registers. The first row shows a cyclops, a *cynocephalus*, the two variants of the *blemmie* or headless man (one with his eyes on his chest and the other with eyes on his shoulders), and a nominally noseless man –oddly not entirely lacking the attribute by the absence of which he should be characterised. The second shows an *amycetirus* or long-



Fig 3. Monstrous races. Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana Cod. Pal. lat. 291, f. 75v (detail)
(© Biblioteca Vaticana).

⁵ Listed as *Rabanum Ethimologiarum* in a catalogue compiled two years after his election as Abbot in 1022; *vid.* the *Chronicon Casinense* (PL 173:646).

lipped man, a *panotus*, a straw-drinker and a mute, a centaur, a satyr and an antipode. In the third are a sciopod, a hippopode, a *macrobius* and two battling pygmies.

These line drawings' stylistic contrast with the laboured and richly coloured illumination employed throughout the Bible is striking –albeit perhaps not surprising– and one may well assume that they are, much like their companion diagrams, intended to be chiefly informative. That said, they can accommodate light-hearted flourishes unwarranted by the text: the antipode, for instance, wields an axe, while the hippopode is shown playing a stringed instrument. Most creatures gesture expressively, and a few interact physically, despite the fact that the textual legends assign them to different geographic regions. Similarly, some have been given hooved feet that are not presupposed by the description, suggesting that observance of textual authority was not an absolute value. The provision of a monstrously-elongated nose for the satyr (which is shown with an outstretched hand) responds to the text's laconic allusion to an “*aduncis naribus*”, and indicates that the terms of the textual *descriptio* could be met with a degree of playfulness –or simply that the illustrator's imagination was ready to seize any pretext to further the strangeness of his monstrous specimens.

To appreciate the *modus operandi* of the HAR. compiler, and best appreciate his imprint on the material, his product should be measured against the sources from which he derived it. Significantly, his repertoire corresponds to a definable thematic unit within the Isidorian-Hrabanian *De portentis*: the section on geographically-ascribed races of monstrous peoples, which as we have seen appears between a short consideration of individual anomalous births and a list of mythological beings from classical tales. The two illustrated copies of Hrabanus' *De universo* tend to favour this same segment on Eastern races over natural portents and outright *fabulae*. This broad thematic agreement is consistent with the notion that the HAR. compiler was working (however loosely) within the terms of a defined pictorial tradition, rather than responding spontaneously to an unillustrated source.

It is worth noting that, in the Isidore-Hrabanus corpus, this body of material is not only differentiated thematically from the subsequent account of mythological beings, but is the object of a degree of epistemological distinction –since the sequence on Greek myth is separated from the account of Eastern races by the observation that there are also “...*fabulose portenta, quae non sunt, sed ficta in causis rerum interpretantur*” (italics mine). It is possible that, within the context of the cosmological and geographical *addenda* in the Arnstein volume, this perceived categorical difference gained a special salience. Captions in HAR. are zealously observant of the geographical ascriptions of monstrous peoples (describing them as being found *in India, in Scythia, in Ethiopia*, or more generally *in Oriente*), specifications that acquire a special practical and conceptual value on account of the three world-maps given in the preceding folios –and particularly in light of the heavily captioned T-O map on f. 241v, where most of these regions are indicated.

The expansions that the HAR. compiler provides in relation to the pictorial selections known to us from extant Hrabanus frontispieces, surely invited by the unusual dimensions of the folio available to him,⁶ suggest that he values exhaustiveness in the treatment of his chosen repertoire over the shock-value of monstrousness *per se*. The specimens unique to this composition –the noseless and speechless men in the first and second rows and the twelve-foot *Macrobius* in the third– are characterised by their relative lack of visual interest as monstrous beings, none allowing for great departures from the normal model of the human body (this unpalatable ordinarieness has been mildly abated by the unwarranted provision of hooved feet to the Macrobius, and by an emphasis on his large stature, which disrupts the display). HAR. thus succeeds in illustrating the almost entire scope

6 While CAS. is also a large volume, at 480 x 350 mm, its illustrations of *De portentis* are grouped into a field of only 280 x 140 mm; VAT. is considerably smaller, at 320 x 285 mm, and its pictorial frontispiece occupies a narrow band that fits the dimensions of the textual column, at 275 x 60 mm.

of Isidore's Eastern races, foregoing only the Giants (*Gigantes*) –possibly because the account given of them is chiefly etymological, rather than ethnographic, and their characteristics overlap those of the *Macrobiani*, their Indian counterparts.

Unlike HAR., both CAS. and PAL.'s pictorial frontispieces are willing on occasion to move beyond the repertoire of geographically-ascribed races, the former opening its sequence with the illustration of a hermaphrodite and closing it with a three-fold depiction of the centaur subspecies, and the latter ending with a large, dramatic picture of the hydra, before yielding pictures of a centauress and chimera in a separate vignette (already on f. 76).

The origins of the illustrated *De portentis*

Before we proceed to compare the pictorial repertoires in HAR. and the Montecassino and Vatican codices in detail, a few words on our current knowledge of the illustration of these latter manuscripts are necessary. The origins of the Hrabanus picture-cycle have, as is well known, been the matter of some debate. Around the mid-twentieth century, both Fritz Saxl and Erwin Panofsky raised tempting hypotheses as to a possible link between the illustrated Hrabanus tradition and a putative illustrated *édition de luxe* of Isidore's *Etymologiae* dating back to Late Antiquity.⁷ The theory collided with the earlier notion, advanced by both Adolph Goldschmidt and Paul Lehmann, that the pictorial material in the CAS. codex was probably the result of a selection of models from disparate sources, most likely effected in the Carolingian period.⁸

More recently, in the most serious work to revisit the codex's pictorial cycle since the mid-century, Marianne Reuter has produced a persuasive argument to the effect that an illustrated Carolingian prototype, corresponding to a second redaction of Hrabanus' text, must have been at the origin of the codex's illustrations – and that these can on occasion be shown to reflect Hrabanus' spiritual glosses, thereby undermining the theory of a systematic borrowing of pictorial material from an archetypal Isidore.⁹ It was on a similar hypothesis that Diane O. le Berrurier based her study of the scientific illustrations devised for the work and their origins.¹⁰

In all these approaches, the illustrations to the CAS. *De portentis* have received more attention than the corresponding composition in PAL., which has generally been assumed to configure a late-gothic reinterpretation of a tradition better preserved by the Montecassino manuscript. In starting with the hermaphrodite, in observance of the textual sequence, CAS. differs from the later PAL. version, which skips this being and has the cynocephalus as its opening specimen. The emergence of the hermaphrodite in CAS. may well be at its own initiative, since this portent is thematically affiliated with the textual sequence on monstrous births (PL 198d-199b) and nothing justifies its interpretation as a representative of a geographically-ascribed race, such as the ones that follow. This is borne out by the observation that “[s]icut autem in singulis gentibus quædam monstra sunt hominum, ita et in universe genere humano quædam monstra sunt gentium [...]”, (PL 196d) which cuts it off from the subsequent repertoire.

There are several other discrepancies, namely in relation to the ordering of specimens in the second and third rows; from its third row PAL. omits the Antipode and Hippopode (which the text gives in sequence) and yields in its place an odd and rather ambiguous depiction of what must be a pygmy.

7 SAXL 1956, 228-241; PANOFSKY 1967, 28.

8 GOLDSCHMIDT 1926, 215-226; LEHMANN 1930, 45-47.

9 REUTER 1993.

10 LE BERRURIER 1978.

The later manuscript proceeds to add an elaborate depiction of the hydra, which CAS. does not show; it also lacks the earlier manuscripts' fourth row, comprising the three types of centaur, but makes up for this at the head of the following column, where it portrays a centauress and the mythic Chimera.

That PAL. is not descended from CAS. was already argued by Lehmann, and is a premise accepted by most subsequent students of the Hrabanus corpus – so there is no need to substantiate it here. These discrepancies must, then, have materialised over a long period, corresponding to the transmission of two groups separated at some indeterminate point before the eleventh century. The perceived status of PAL. as a late incarnation of the cycle – evidently quite a laboured one, and therefore likely to have implemented a number of “modernizing” changes of its own accord¹¹ – can be nuanced, however, by drawing the evidence of HAR. into the equation.

Harley and the Vatican *De portentis*

HAR. is invariably absent from the discussions of the *De universo* picture-cycle listed above, with the exception of a note by Reuter characterising it *en passant*, and mistakenly, as a Solinus-related composition with no bearing on the Hrabanus corpus.¹² As a result, the close compositional and iconographic affinity that exists between it and the two *De portentis* frontispieces has gone unnoticed. Close comparison reveals that the clearest parallel with HAR. is found in the PAL. composition – which is like it Southern German, albeit three centuries later. With the exception of the additions proper to HAR., the suppression of the antipode (discussed below) and a few minor re-arrangements prompted by the proportions of the page, both the selection of specimens and their order are in perfect agreement between the two displays. Iconographies are more often than not concordant, sometimes even down to creatures' poses, gestures and interactions.

Because their convergences are for the most part evident, it will suffice to summarise them briefly here, emphasising only those few instances that require commentary. We begin with a point of agreement that is at first sight bewildering: the illustration of the eating habits of the first few races in the sequence. Close reading of the Isidorian-Hrabanian text shows that these are the “ferarum carnes” described as forming the diet of the cyclopes, who are also qualified as “agriophagitæ” in this account. Imaginatively, but clearly prompted by this specification, PAL. equips the representatives of this and the following race with great torn limbs. It is possible that in earlier stages of the tradition their appearance as human limbs was clearer – we notice that such attributes are a common iconographic trope in the illustration of races said to be ferocious in the English *Wonders of the East* tradition, as well as in the iconography of the great thirteenth-century *mappæ-mundi*, and are often given to creatures not properly described as *anthropofagi*. The HAR. compiler – whose illustrative work is closely accompanied by the transcription of lines of text with which to caption the figures – reproduces the expression in his legend above the picture of the cyclops, and appears to have reinterpreted it, quite correctly, as meaning that these races prey on wild animals. He has also unwarrantedly expanded the habit to the pair of acephali that follow.

A case of partial divergence occurs in the third row (fifth figure in HAR., fourth PAL.). The twelfth-century illustration shows a satyr-like being, having the lower body of a horse and a man's torso. His hands are joined as if in prayer, and his head crowned (seemingly yet another frivolous embellishment). The caption gives this as one of the *Artabatitæ*, who “...ut pecora ambulare dicuntur”, and his place accords with the textual sequence. The two Hrabanus manuscripts depict the

¹¹ REUTER 1993, 33.

¹² REUTER 1993, 112, n. 3.

creature as a large crouching man, his naked body bent into an arch –an iconography that we know also from later sources, such as the bestiary in London, Westminster Abbey Library MS 22, f. 3, of the mid-thirteenth century, and some related third-family bestiaries (fig. 4). His hybrid appearance in HAR. can clearly be explained by a reinterpretation of the expression *ut pecora* as meaning that these creatures have the lower body of a hoofed quadruped –and not simply that they walk on all fours. This particular departure from the conventional iconography for this race, then, denotes a return to the phrasing in the descriptive text, whether by the HAR. compiler or by his direct antecedents. The other major disagreement has a more straightforward explanation: PAL.'s lack of the antipode –which both HAR. and CAS. depict in the right sequence among the strangely-legged monsters– is surely due to the fact that its text, as in some other German versions, was missing the corresponding paragraph.¹³

Another case where the evidence of HAR. sheds light on the relationship between the two Hra-



Fig 4. Dedication page. London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius CIII, f. 19 (detail)
(photo: Miguel Ayres de Campos-Tovar).

banus compositions concerns the Satyr. CAS. diverges from the two German versions, most noticeably in that it colours its specimen in dark brown to show that his body is covered in hair (this is also the colour employed for the lower bodies of its centaurs). The detail is unwarranted by the *De portentis* text, but other influential traditions (namely Pliny's *Natural History* and the *Collectanea* of his epitomiser Solinus) do describe such creatures as being covered in thick hair, informing the motif of the *satyrus pilosus*.¹⁴ The long-standing predisposition in favour of CAS. as a more faithful representative of the illustrated archetype leads Le Beurrier to consider the figuration in PAL. a re-

¹³ That the model used by the HAR. compiler still included this paragraph is shown by the fact that he quotes it in his legend.

¹⁴ LECOUEUX 1982, 156-157.

interpretation by the late-gothic artist,¹⁵ but the HAR. repertoire reveals that this variety had already appeared at least three hundred years before.

Even though not all of its relationships with PAL. are straightforward, the evidence afforded by HAR. seems to point us in an important direction. This composition, like the PAL. codex, was produced in Southwest Germany, and clearly obtained the bulk of its illustrations from a manuscript that was closely related to the fifteenth-century Hrabanus, but made before the last quarter of the twelfth century. Whether or not this German chain of transmission was ultimately rooted in nearby Fulda and in the images of a presumed Carolingian archetype, it is clear that the PAL. artist must have been more faithful to its antecedents than one might at first suppose for such a late and laboured manuscript.

Illustrations unique to the Cassinese and Vatican codices

The fact that PAL.'s *De portentis* frontispiece has a considerably old German pedigree suggests that the older Cassinese codex should not automatically be assumed to represent a more archetypal version of the picture cycle, at least insofar as the monstrous races are concerned. While the date of *De universo*'s crossing of the Alps cannot be known, it is worth remembering, for the sake of historical contextualisation, that the illustrated Hrabanus' emergence in Italy in the early 1020s occurs at a moment of marked Germanophilia in the history of Montecassino's religious community. It is no doubt telling that its production should coincide with the assertion of Henry II's imperial power over the abbey, consummated precisely with the promotion of Theobald's election in 1022 –which sparked a particularly close relationship between the custodians of St. Benedict's tomb and the German Empire. More palpably for our purposes, Henry is known to have consolidated his new-found preponderance over the monastic house through a series of gifts, among which were illuminated manuscripts.¹⁶

Among the innovations inherent to the Cassinese *De portentis* frontispiece seems to have been the illustration of the three centaurs in its fourth row. These three pictures –which we can interpret as representing the Mino(cen)taur, the Onocentaur and the Hippocentaur (PL 111:198 c-d)– sit awkwardly with the remainder of the composition, causing both the vertical and the horizontal borders of its frame to dissolve. The lower parts of their bodies spread carelessly onto the lower margin, one touching the edge of the folio –suggesting that their inclusion, whether prompted by the illustrator's model or conceived as an innovation, was not properly anticipated.

The decision to illustrate these items in CAS. is in itself curious. Considerations as to the visual potential of monstrous races were clearly a decisive part of the selection process overseeing the composition of the illustration, since, as we have seen, both CAS. and PAL. tend to skip races without obvious, or interesting, physical deformities. The choice to take up an entire row with what is essentially a three-fold repetition of the same iconographic type is therefore difficult to reconcile with the spirit that has presided over the rest of the composition. More strikingly, there is no evidence in the illustrations as they stand that they seek to take into account those few elements which, according to the text, differentiate the three varieties of the centaur race –namely, the different nature of their lower bodies.

The iconography as we have it here is peculiar in that, whilst ignoring such obvious taxonomical elements (invariably observed with great zeal in the rest of the sequence) it yields a detail not warranted by the text. Indeed, all are shown carrying plants. As has been observed, this type is well

¹⁵ LE BERRURIER 1978, 68.

¹⁶ BLOCH 1946, 173-187.

attested in certain herbals – it is used to represent Chiron, the foremost sage of the Centaur race, exhibiting the species that he has discovered: the centaury.¹⁷ The Vienna and New York copies of Dioscurides, which describe the two kinds of centaury, do not have explanatory figures. However, these do occur in Western traditions of Dioscurides, and in pseudo-Apuleius' herbal whose set of illustrations were basically those of Dioscurides. In one of the best known copies of this fifth century work, a Centaur holds a stylised *centaurea* in a fashion similar to that in the CAS. miniature (Cassel, Landesbibl., cod. phys. Fol. 10, f. 38^v, ninth or tenth century). To this observation we are able to add a few important facts. Firstly, and in consonance with the hypothesis of an Italic accretion, circulation of these manuscripts is well attested in the Italian Peninsula but not in Germany; secondly, a ninth-century illustrated example is extant in Montecassino (Cod. Casinensis 97). Sadly, the Montecassino manuscript is now missing its opening pages, but the eleventh-century OE translation in British Library MS Cotton Vitellius CIII, long thought to be derived from a Southern Italian copy¹⁸ –and in all probability a close relation of the Montecassino Pseudo-Apuleius itself¹⁹– still has the exuberant title page showing Chiron and Æsculapius handing the work to Plato (f. 19)²⁰ (fig 5). The centaur here is very much identical to our CAS. type –particularly to the middle specimen, which is shown bearded and precisely in the same pose, still holding a branch of centaury close to his chest. His right arm preserves in CAS. a position that is seemingly vestigial of its original role, supporting the book offered to Plato –as witnessed by the Vitellius herbal. A relatively precise idea as to the provenance of the Centaur illustrations in CAS. can therefore be formed.



Fig 5. Artabatita. London, Westminster Abbey Library MS 22, f. 3 (detail) (© Westminster Abbey Library).

17 LE BERRURIER 1978, 65.

18 VRIEND 1984, xvi.

19 SINGER 1927, 28.

20 Voigts rightly observes that this opening page observes a continental rather than an Anglo-Saxon model, but establishes no connections with Montecassino (VOIGTS 1977, 8).

PAL. as has been noted, yields a few unique specimens of its own, also connected with the mythological section of the *De portentis* text. While I am unable to provide a detailed account of their characteristics here, there is some evidence to suggest that their inclusion was prompted by the manuscript, or that of some close precedent, cultural context, and maybe (as was the case in CAS. with respect to the Centaur illustrations) by the availability of some convenient illustrated source unrelated to our text. Thus, the inclusion of the female centaur finds no basis in the text, and –as Le Berrurier has noted– her unwarranted gesturing may indicate adaption of an iconographic model that once bore some attribute.²¹ Likewise, the portrayal of the hydra, whose larger size breaks the regularity of the display, does not accord clearly with the textual description of a “...serpentem cum novem capitibus”, turning the purported snake into a legged dragon. It is not unlikely that this solution is obtained from the illustration of the same being as it occurs further in the codex, in Hrabanus’ Book VIII (*De serpentibus*) –where it is described as *draco multorum capitum* and aptly portrayed as such.

The portrayal of the chimera seems to be the object of its own range of obfuscations –although their meaning is more difficult to correlate with the chronology of the pictorial cycle. The creature, described as “triformem bestiam”, is here reduced to a lion-dragon hybrid, and given the pair of wings that is traditionally associated with the latter. The root of the misunderstanding seems to be the same confusion between *draco*-as-snake and *draco*-as-dragon –an interpretative problem present in several of PAL.’s pictures throughout the ensuing *De serpentis*. Lost in the picture is the notion that the monster has the body of a goat, and a serpent as a tail –an idea consonant with its classical depictions.

We end this section with a brief note on a race that all three compositions show, but, intriguingly, each portrays uniquely: the pygmies. HAR., as will be remembered, shows a pair engaged in sword-play; this may configure either a playful enlivenment of the scene or an allusion to their bellicose nature, which dates back to their proverbial war with the cranes, rooted in Homeric legend (*Illiad*, III.5). The iconography in PAL., whatever its sources, appears to have become condensed so as to accommodate the neighbouring and much larger hydra: a single pygmy is shown, and identified as such solely by his size. He emerges from a floating, concave object that strangely resembles the shield held by one of the fighters in HAR. CAS., meanwhile, yields an entirely different iconography, albeit also showing two representatives of the race: they sit peacefully under a tree. This solution is interesting insofar as it appears to denote engagement with one of the rare expansions inherent to Hrabanus’ treatment of the *De portentis* text: the epithet “septemcaulinos” that he adds onto Isidore’s description. This expression (he explains) is used to stress the smallness of their stature, as it indicates that seven can sit under a single cabbage-leaf.

Conclusion

The preceding observations have hopefully shown beyond doubt that the gallery of monstrous races in HAR. is not, to use a recent formulation, “one individual’s meditation on the order of things”²² –or indeed a mere assortment of images in the spirit of artists’ model books²³– but occupies a place within a pre-existing and enveloping tradition.

Concerted analysis of this folio and extant illustrations produced for the Hrabanian *De portentis* shows that Eastern monsters, rather than other categories of prodigy, tended to form the bulk of the

21 LE BERRURIER 1978, 44.

22 WRIGHT 2013, 9.

23 KLINE 2001, 137-138.

illustration accompanying the tract –but that this selection was open to transformation and perceived improvement at the hands of different artists or editors. Such additions could diversify the pictorial repertoire with beings present in other passages in the text –as with the provision of the Hermaphrodite and Centaurs in CAS., or of the Hydra, Centauress and Chimera in PAL.– or reinforce its allegiance to the geographical survey, by rendering it exhaustive, as was seemingly the intent of the Arnstein compiler.

Evidently, this material's emergence among computistic and natural-historical fragments assembled in the physical 'peripheries' of a Bible manuscript raises more questions than this article could hope to address regarding the versatility of *De portentis* and its pictorial contents –namely, their ability to migrate into different patterns of thinking, reading and imagining, and to find a place within different clusters of encyclopaedic and natural-historical knowledge in the monastic library. Further research into this and other aspects of the Isidorian and Hrabanian 'monstrous' *corpus* would no doubt leave us better equipped to appreciate its remarkable vitality, and the continued fascination that it and similar material exerted throughout the Middle Ages.

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